

## Voters could see 14 or more ballot questions in 2006

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With nine statewide ballot questions already on the November 2006 general election ballot and five more beginning to collect signatures, Nevada is clearly following the trend begun in California of taking big governmental decisions out of the hands of elected officials.

The two proposals garnering most of the attention are Assemblywoman Sharron Angle's Nevada version of California's Proposition 13 and Sen. Bob Beers', R Las Vegas, version of Colorado's tax and spending control amendment.

Neither has qualified for a place on the ballot yet and, since the signature requirement - 10 percent of last time's total vote - was driven up dramatically by the big turnout in 2004, it won't be as easy to do so. The bar is now set at 83,184 valid signatures compared to 51,337 two years ago.

Both of those proposed constitutional amendments are designed to put the clamps on government spending and taxes. Their prime supporters say lawmakers can't be trusted to hold down government spending.

Local government officials say passage of either would be disastrous to their ability to provide services - many of which are mandated by either the state or federal governments.

Nevada Association of Counties president-elect Norm Frey of Fallon and NACO Executive Director Andrew List said neither of those proposals worked in the states which originated them and they won't work here.

"You only have to look to our neighbor to the west to see that the ability of local government to provide services was seriously reduced by (Proposition 13)," List said.

Frey pointed out Colorado voters called a halt to the spending caps this fall because government services were on the verge of collapse.

The Nevada League of Cities has expressed similar concerns.

But Angle is adamant there have been very few problems for state and local government caused by California Proposition 13. And Beers says Nevada's growth along with its constitutionally mandated balanced budget will keep it from having the problems Colorado did.

List and Frey said property tax reform approved by the 2005 Legislature should be given a chance to work rather than thrown out after just six months.

"That bill was a good compromise between all the interests," Frey said.

"I'm not sure you want to tie state and local governments up in a formula in the constitution because, if something happens, they can't respond quickly enough," List said.

But those aren't the only measures already on the ballot.

Two already received voter approval once in 2004 and will become part of the Constitution if approved again. "Education First" requires education budgets be completed before other governmental budgets in an attempt to better isolate them from political maneuvering. The minimum-wage question would raise Nevada's minimum wage \$1 an hour to \$6.15 and tie future increases to inflation. Minimum wage hasn't been raised since 1997.

Also on the ballot is a petition to legalize possession of small amounts of marijuana. It's the second attempt to legalize personal use of pot. The 2004 version, along with two measures to limit smoking were knocked off the ballot by a legal technicality. When organizers collected the signatures, the signatures required were 51,337. But they turned the petitions in 10 days after the November 2004 election, which raised the minimum number of signatures to 83,184. A court agreed "last general election" meant just that and tossed all three out before they could be presented to the Legislature.

All are back this year - and qualified for the ballot.

The Clean Indoor Air Act sponsored by the American Lung Association seeks sweeping restrictions on public, primarily indoor, smoking. The alternative "Responsibly Protect Nevadans From Second Hand Smoke Act" is sponsored by the gaming industry and, predictably, exempts casinos and resorts from smoking restrictions. If both pass, the one with the most positive votes becomes law.

County officials last week filed another petition to constitutionally prohibit the state from dumping "unfunded mandates" on local governments. Unfunded mandates are requirements, programs or legal changes which cost local governments money without providing either the funding or authorization to raise the funding to pay for them.

There are also four proposals put on the ballot from the 2005 Legislature.

AJR11 would split the make up of the University Board of Regents: half would be appointed and half elected instead of all the members being elected. AJR13 would let the Legislature call itself into special session even if the governor refused to call the special session. Right now, only the governor can call a special session.

SJR11 would pay legislators for every day of the session. The original Nevada Constitution set the length of the session at 60 days and cut off legislative salaries after that point. Now the session is capped at 120 days, but pay still ends at day 60. Lawmakers say it's fair to pay them for the number of days worked.

Finally, AB554 makes a variety of changes to exemptions in the sales and use tax - including exempting the purchase of farm equipment from sales taxes. Voters rejected a more complicated version in 2004 which included exemptions for a laundry list of special industries.

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